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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

National Intelligence Officers

NFAC #503-81
3 February 1981

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

VIA : Bruce C. Clarke, Jr.
Deputy Director, National Foreign Assessment

FROM : Robert M. Gates *RS*
National Intelligence Officer for USSR-EE

SUBJECT : Tough Talk and the Grain Embargo

1. One of the most serious mistakes of the previous Administration in its dealings with the Soviet Union was the too frequent failure to couple its tough, anti-Soviet talk with tough, specific actions. As a result, the Soviets soon came to disregard the talk as empty rhetoric. (C)

2. Should the recent tough statements relating to the USSR by the President and Secretary Haig be followed by lifting the grain embargo, especially at a time when the Soviets are looking so hard for clues to the new Administration's "real" Soviet policy, there is a risk they will conclude there has been no change from the recent past -- i.e., strident talk substituting for action or even masking conciliation. In short, it is important that the Soviets not be misled about or allowed to miscalculate the Administration's intentions or purposes by what they would regard as a conciliatory gesture seemingly inconsistent with the tone of recent statements by the President and Secretary of State. You may wish to make this point in the Cabinet discussion on the grain embargo. (C)

3. More broadly, I believe you should counsel senior members of the Administration to downplay tough talk about the USSR -- to which the Soviets are by now well inured -- until such talk can be accompanied or preceded by specific actions. The Administration's first signals to the Soviets should be unambiguous and should bring home starkly to them that empty US rhetoric is a thing of the past -- that they now confront a different sort of American adversary. Only actions can quickly accomplish that objective. (C)

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